

Guidelines for Designating Student Employees as Essential Personnel During Suspension of Operations

Purpose

These guidelines provide directions to academic and administrative units on the limited and appropriate use of student employees to support essential University operations during a declared suspension of operations (e.g., severe weather, public health emergency, or campus closure).

The University's overarching goal during any suspension of operations is to minimize the number of individuals required to report to work while ensuring continuity of only those functions necessary to sustain operations, protect assets, and maintain health and safety.

Essential functions include those required to preserve safety, maintain critical infrastructure, support individuals remaining on campus, and prevent irreparable damage to facilities, research, or operations as previously defined by the University.¹

Guiding Principles²

- The health, safety, and well-being of student employees shall be the primary consideration when determining whether a student employee may be designated as essential during a suspension of operations.
- Student employees are not typically expected to perform essential functions during a suspension of operations.
- Designating student employees as essential should be exceptional, limited, and clearly justified.
- Operational continuity must be balanced with student safety, academic priorities, and institutional risk, with student well-being taking precedence whenever these considerations conflict.
- In alignment with existing University guidance, designation of student employees as essential should be avoided whenever possible.

¹ Essential/Critical Staff Guidelines: Covid-19 Pandemic

² Suspension of Operation due to Adverse Weather FAQ

General Guidance

Units should avoid pre-designating student employees as essential whenever reasonable alternatives exist, including reassignment of duties to regular staff or temporary modification of operations.

A student employee may be considered for essential designation only when:

- The work directly supports a defined essential operation; and
- The function cannot reasonably be deferred; and
- Staffing the function with regular staff is not feasible.

Student employees should not be used to backfill essential roles solely for administrative convenience or cost considerations.

Criteria for Exceptional Designation

A student employee may be designated as essential only when all of the following conditions are met:

- The role directly supports an essential operational function during the suspension period.
- The duties are appropriate for a student employee with respect to training, supervision, and safety.
- The work is time-sensitive and cannot be postponed without material operational impact.
- The student has voluntarily agreed to the assignment and understands expectations during a suspension of operations.
- The student must receive advance communication regarding the nature of the essential designation, reporting expectations, compensation practices, safety requirements, and procedures that will apply during a suspension of operations.
- The designation is reviewed and approved by the Dean, Vice President, or equivalent authority and must be reflected in the employee's Job Data record within SuccessFactors to ensure accurate reporting, payroll administration, and institutional oversight.

Departments must evaluate whether the assignment introduces elevated safety or liability risk, particularly in hazardous conditions or public health scenarios.³

³ Essential Critical Workers Dos and Don'ts

Student Safety and Reporting Considerations

When determining whether a student employee should be asked to work during a suspension of operations, departments should give primary consideration to the student's safety and ability to report to work without unreasonable risk.

To minimize travel-related risk, departments should make every reasonable effort to utilize student employees who:

- Reside in University housing;
- Reside on or near campus; or
- Can safely report to work without significant travel during adverse conditions.

Departments should not expect student employees to travel under conditions that present an unreasonable risk to their health or safety. Additionally, designation as essential personnel does not mean a student employee should automatically report during every suspension of operations. Student employees may report only when specifically asked or scheduled by their department. Departments should limit staffing to the number needed for the essential operation and rotate designated students when operationally feasible.

Documentation and Oversight⁴

To ensure consistency, transparency, and institutional oversight:

- Units must formally document all student employee essential designations.
- Responsibility for determining and maintaining essential designations rests with the employing department and the approving Dean, Vice President, or equivalent authority.
- Approved essential designations must be recorded in the employee's Job Data record within SuccessFactors (SF).
- Departments are responsible for ensuring essential designations remain current and are updated whenever operational needs change.
- Essential designations should be reviewed at least annually and reassessed with each declared suspension of operations.
- Human Resources, Payroll, and Benefits may utilize system reports for audit, reporting, and administration purposes.

⁴ Essential/Critical Staff Guidelines: Covid-19 Pandemic

- Departments are responsible for ensuring students understand:
 - Reporting expectations
 - Pay
 - Applicable safety protocols
- Prior to each academic year, units should review existing student employee essential designations to confirm continued operational necessity and ensure SF records remain accurate.
- Essential designations maintained within SF may be reported through approved University reporting tools, including Cognos, to support operational review, payroll administration, and periodic audits.

Compensation During Suspension of Operations

When a student employee is designated as essential and works during a declared suspension of operations:

The recommended practice is to compensate the student employee in alignment with nonexempt staff performing essential work (i.e., regular pay plus time-and-a-half for hours worked during the suspension), consistent with how essential staff are compensated

Student employees who do not work during a suspension of operations are not paid, consistent with existing wage and hour guidance. Students are compensated for “emergency pay” using an Additional Pay Request Form in lieu of hours on the timesheet.⁵

Inappropriate Uses of Essential Designation

Student employees should not be designated as essential for:

- Routine or convenience staffing
- Coverage of non-critical administrative or academic functions
- Work that can be postponed until normal operations resume
- Roles that do not directly support defined essential operations

Student employees who report during a closure but are not designated as essential will be released and paid only for hours worked, consistent with current guidance.⁶

⁵ Suspension of Operation due to Adverse Weather FAQ

⁶ Suspension of Operation due to Adverse Weather FAQ

Summary Statement

Student employees designated as essential should represent the minimum number necessary to support critical operations, and every effort should be made to utilize students who can safely perform these responsibilities while minimizing travel and personal risk.

Designating student employees as essential during a suspension of operations is an exceptional measure—not a standard practice.

Units are expected to apply these guidelines conservatively, prioritizing:

- Safety of the campus community
- Protection of students from unnecessary risk exposure
- True operational necessity
- Consistent application across the institution

Clear documentation, appropriate oversight, and alignment in pay practices are critical to mitigating institutional risk while preserving the flexibility needed to address limited, high-need scenarios.